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ABSTRACT

This report discusses the activities of the Education Commission of the States (ECS) to foster quality in higher education. Chapter 1 summarizes the ideas of Colorado Governor Roy Romer, 1994-95 ECS chairman, in regard to what state leaders should expect from higher education. Chapter 2 draws on conferences and focus groups ECS convened involving political, business, and education leaders to explore what quality in higher education means and how it can be measured. Chapter 3 analyzes what undergraduate students expect in terms of the quality of services provided and the results achieved. Chapter 4 summarizes the findings of research on the characteristics of high-quality undergraduate education. Chapter 5 summarizes key findings from the previous chapters and outlines a shared agenda for quality involving governmental and institutional leaders, faculty and students, and employers and business leaders. (MDM)

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MAKING QUALITY COUNT

in undergraduate education

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MAKING QUALITY COUNT in undergraduate education

A Report for the ECS Chairman's "Quality Counts" Agenda in Higher Education

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1994-1995 ECS Chairman

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The Education Commission of the States is a nonprofit, nationwide interstate compact formed in 1965. The primary purpose of the commission is to help governors, state legislators, state education officials and others develop policies to improve the quality of education at all levels.

Forty-nine states, the District of Columbia, American Samoa, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands are members. The ECS offices are at 707 17th Street, Suite 2700, Denver, Colorado 80202-3427.

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Contents

Acknowledgments iv

Foreword v

Chapter 1.

Making Quality Count — A Governor's Perspective on Higher Education 1

Chapter 2.

Toward Common Ground: Political, Business and Education Leaders' Views on Quality Undergraduate Education 5

Chapter 3.

What Students Expect from Undergraduate Education: State Roles to Enhance Consumer Information and Accountability 11

Chapter 4.

What Research Says About Improving Higher Education Quality, And What States Can Do About It 17

Chapter 5.

Next Steps: Quality as a Shared Agenda 23

Acknowledgments

Annually, the Education Commission of the States (ECS) calls upon a governor to provide leadership as ECS chairman and to set a substantive education policy agenda during his or her tenure. As 1994-95 chairman, Governor Roy Romer of Colorado demonstrated exceptional leadership and commitment to strengthening the position of the organization as well as to his substantive focus on higher education. As this report shows, Governor Romer sets high expectations for himself and others. In addition to the governor, ECS is indebted to key members of his staff, including Bill Porter, John Calhoon and Kay Logan, who contributed to this report as well as to his year as chairman.

The Wingspread conference (which initiated this report) was organized and led by Kay McClenney and Frank Newman of ECS, with specific contributions from Peter Ewell, Margaret A. Miller, Dennis Jones and Ted Marchese, and the active assistance of all participants, the Johnson Foundation and the Pew Charitable Trusts.

The regional focus-group conversations that provide the basis for several chapters were organized and led by McClenney and facilitated by Peter Ewell and Dennis Jones, both from the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS), with support from Charles Lenth and Linda Rose.

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Peter Ewell, senior associate at NCHEMS, was the primary interpreter of the "field data" and author of chapters 2, 3 and 4 of this report. Peter's intellectual imprint pervades this work, as indeed his influence has pervaded collegiate assessment and accountability discussions in colleges and universities around the nation for more than a decade.

Dennis Jones was particularly important in working with Governor Romer to shape the overall direction of his higher education agenda, as well as in preparing this report. Russ Edgerton of the American Association for Higher Education also provided important support and encouragement.

At ECS, Lenth was responsible for preparing this report, authoring several sections and assisting with all others, and had a major part in carrying out Governor Romer's substantive agenda as ECS chairman. Editorial assistance and document preparation were provided by Josie Canales, Susan Godfrey, Sherry Freeland Walker, Kim Moyer and Anna West.

Most important, ECS acknowledges and expresses deep appreciation to the many individuals who participated in our numerous and always challenging conversations about quality in higher education, including many campus leaders and state or system policymakers; professionals, business leaders and employers; faculty and students; and political leaders from state legislatures, statehouses and the federal government. Each individually and all collectively added their own dimensions of quality to this most important but elusive subject.

Foreword

As the 1994-95 chairman of the Education Commission of the States (ECS), I chose "Quality Counts" as the theme and higher education as the focus for my work. I took on the task of exploring how policy leaders and the public can make quality count in higher education. I began by posing some tough questions about what we expect from our institutions and how we can ensure these expectations are reflected in undergraduate teaching, in institutional priorities and activities, and in the performance of all colleges, universities and community colleges. During the past year, we explored these issues from several perspectives, and our findings are summarized in this report. It is my intent that this report serve as a starting point for further action on these issues.

I chose to focus on quality in higher education because of my curiosity and uneasiness about how people inside and outside colleges and universities think about quality and accountability. Because higher education is so important to our future well-being, our investments in colleges and universities must pay high returns for both individuals and society as a whole. It seems clear to me that as state leaders and as parents, we have the responsibility to take steps to ensure our institutions of higher learning meet our needs and expectations.

Yet, I continue to be amazed at the resistance I encounter to examining whether we can measure and report on effective learning at individual institutions and provide good information to inform consumers about their choices. I also continue to be amazed at the inability of policymakers and public leaders to create meaningful and useful accountability systems for higher education. Finally, I am amazed at how many people are content to rest on the laurels of the past and insist that our higher education institutions need not change because they are the best in the world.

Increasingly, however, both the public and state leaders are expressing concerns about the quality and effectiveness of their higher education institutions. These concerns reflect a wide range of issues, including: increasing costs, declining access, large class sizes, lack of course offerings, and reduced productivity and faculty workload.

My ECS agenda focused on quality because it is the heart of addressing all these issues. Agreeing on what we mean by quality and measuring this quality in various institutions is essential to how we address issues of cost, access and the effectiveness of teaching and learning. Decisions about which institutions grow and receive more dollars in a state higher education system should be made on the basis of which ones offer the best programs. Where students choose to attend and how much they are willing to pay for that experience should be based on the value they expect to receive. How institutions organize undergraduate degree programs and faculty work should be decided on the basis of what provides a high-quality learning experience. We need to be clear about what we value in higher education so we can act on those values.

The ECS "Quality Counts" agenda worked with students and other "consumers" of higher education, leaders in higher education, and leaders in business and public life to define as clearly as possible their expectations and objectives for colleges and universities. We also asked how society should attempt to measure and convey quality. And we discussed which public policies could help sustain and enhance quality, particularly in undergraduate education. What we heard and learned is included in this report, organized around the following chapters and topics.

- **Chapter 1** summarizes my observations as a governor about what state leaders should expect from higher education. It reflects my own experiences as a decision-maker for state appropriations for higher education and as a parent who has helped seven children choose a college.
- **Chapter 2** draws on conferences and focus groups ECS convened involving political, business and education leaders to explore what quality in higher education means and how it can be measured. We found substantial "common ground" in what quality undergraduate education should be, but distinct differences in the results these groups expect and in the most appropriate means to measure and support quality.
- **Chapter 3** analyzes what students, as the direct consumers of higher education, expect in terms of the quality of services provided and the results achieved. Since well-informed consumer choices are a way to establish a market for high quality, this chapter discusses state roles in ensuring adequate consumer information.
- **Chapter 4** summarizes the findings of research on the characteristics of high-quality undergraduate education. These findings should be more widely recognized

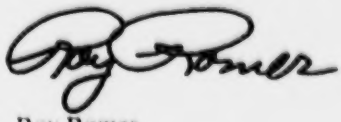
within colleges and universities and reflected in the state and federal policies that support higher education.

- **Chapter 5** summarizes key findings from the foregoing chapters and outlines a shared agenda for quality involving government and institutional leaders, faculty and students, employers and business leaders working together and with others to ensure and enhance the quality of our colleges and universities.

The information in these chapters provides clear direction and focus to advance our work. Our challenge now is to take what we learned this year and design state and institutional policies that reflect and reinforce these concepts of quality. But we cannot pretend that government at any level can mandate or regulate real quality in higher education, and we must recognize the great diversity in the missions and organization of colleges and universities. Our task is to shape the context — including the public policies and mechanics of self-regulation — in which they operate, so that market forces, incentives, public investments and accountability mechanisms strengthen and enhance quality.

With this in mind, I am gathering a small, bipartisan group of current governors, former governors and state legislative leaders to work through these issues as the ECS Leadership Council on State Policies for Higher Education. Over the next two years, we will help states — beginning with our own — set a meaningful agenda for higher education based on current and future public needs, work with other governors and legislators to translate these agendas into appropriate state policies, and develop the tools and approaches necessary to monitor and sustain progress.

As this report shows, measuring and monitoring quality in our higher education institutions is a difficult but essential task. Our real work lies ahead.



Roy Romer
Governor of Colorado
1994-95 Chairman
Education Commission of the States

Colorado Governor Roy Romer was 1994-95 chairman of the Education Commission of the States. Governor of Colorado since 1986, he has emphasized improving the quality of the Colorado education system. He helped draft and successfully pushed a charter schools bill through the legislature, making Colorado one of the first states to have such legislation. He has been a leader both nationally and in Colorado for the development of academic standards for public schools.

Nationally, Romer served as first chairman of the National Education Goals Panel, where he helped develop the nation's first education report card. He also served as 1992-93 chairman of the National Governors' Association and as 1991-92 chairman of the National Council on Education Standards and Testing.

Chapter 1

MAKING QUALITY COUNT — A GOVERNOR'S PERSPECTIVE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Roy Romer, governor of Colorado and 1994-95 ECS chairman

A good consumer would not purchase a car without giving considerable thought to the relative value of the car, its design, comparisons with competitors' models and what benefits its purchase will bring. Neither should public leaders — nor the public in general — commit public resources without a good sense about the return we are getting on our investment.

Investments in education are a long way from a simple automobile purchase, but the principle is the same. To purchase a car we can look at very specific research, historical data and comparative information to help us make informed choices — which not only helps to ensure a good purchase, but also creates a market for quality products. I do not feel confident that I have the kind of information about higher education necessary to make a well-informed personal or public investment. And if *I* — as a governor and a father of seven college-educated children — do not have this information, then I doubt that students or the public at large does either.

Let me be clear that I believe higher education in the United States is unparalleled around the globe. It is the best of its kind, and its accomplishments have often exceeded our most ambitious expectations. But it was not always that way and we should keep in mind how and under what circumstances our higher education system has excelled.

Only when the United States began to feel pressure for technological innovation, to fight the Second World War and to keep pace with competing nations, did we push higher education to excel. We chose to invest in new ideas and institutions with a new commitment to research and to provide opportunities for returning GIs, many of whom would not have continued their education otherwise. This massive historical investment of both human and financial resources transformed the face of higher education, created the strongest research complex in the world and provided a whole new class of educated workers for an economy that needed their skills. Our goals were clear and our academic institutions helped to get us there.

However, I am troubled that even though we have a higher education system recognized as the best in the world, we have failed to ensure that it evolves to meet changing demands. Moreover, there is a growing body of evidence from the National Adult Literacy Survey, from employers, and from students and institutions themselves, that a college education guarantees neither the basic skills nor the habits of the heart and mind expected of well-educated individuals.

It is not sufficient to rest on the laurels of past success or the record of the present. For all its rich history, there are too many signs that higher education is not taking seriously its responsibility to maintain a strong commitment to undergraduate learning; to be accountable for products that are relevant, effective and of demonstrable quality; and to provide society with the full benefits from investments in research and public service. Thus, the challenge to higher education is to be sufficiently responsive and adaptable in light of these new demands and to propel our nation to the forefront of a new era. Unless political leaders, educators and the public accept this challenge, higher education soon may be a worn-out system that has seen its best days.

Looking Forward

To meet this challenge, I believe we need, first, to clarify our expectations for higher education; second, to examine our practices and policies to see if they support and are consistent with these expectations; and third, to develop methods to monitor how well institutions meet those expectations in setting their priorities and providing services.

As a governor, I see three areas in which it is critical to establish a clear agenda for higher education and to rethink some of our current institutional practices and state policies.

1 Enhance the quality of the learning experience

We must start with an honest appraisal of where we are and then seek much greater clarity on what we mean by high-quality, college-level learning. How well does higher education ensure the highest quality of student learning, especially at the undergraduate level? Do we even know how much students are really learning?

At many campuses, professors using outdated teaching techniques outnumber those using effective new strategies. Traditional lectures to auditoriums full of bored students outweigh dynamic, interactive learning environments that are more effective. Academic calendars continue to use conventional schedules with little question about whether they are arranged in a way that best promotes learning and uses students' time and campus facilities most effectively. Business leaders, employers, students and others outside of higher education believe that "high quality" means being responsive to these pressing needs.

But there is little evidence that the majority of undergraduate institutions are dedicated to providing the best teaching strategies and the most relevant coursework, or to modeling the characteristics of an effective "learning organization." The institution whose governing board has called for the institution to "reinvent" itself in the interest of improving student learning, unfortunately, is still the exception. And I know of even fewer institutions that have considered a real "value-added" approach to student learning — carefully assessing, for example, how much students have improved their writing skills after studying at the institution for a number of years.

At the institution level, the balance between research and teaching needs re-examination. Research is a critical role for an academic institution. But teaching, especially at institutions that claim to be "teaching institutions," should not suffer so that research alone can flourish.

Traditional degree programs may need revision in light of the changing knowledge base or in order to be relevant for today's demanding workplace. Traditional faculty and departmental organization may not be the best match for the needs of students or society. But on those rare occasions when the internal organization of higher education is revised, the changes too frequently reflect the interests within institutions, rather than the interests of students and society.

We need a new ethic that says the quality of the college or university is determined first and foremost by the quality of the learning experience — the learning of the students and the learning style of the organization.

2 Develop better alignment between higher education and state priorities

Higher education requires substantial funding from taxpayers (in my own state, it takes as much as one-sixth of the total state budget), but this funding typically does not fit with or reinforce other state priorities. Too often, institutional incentives run in opposition to many of those that drive state agendas. The fact that states — and therefore the public — provide substantial support for higher education seems to get lost in the shuffle, with little connection to results. Governors across the country do not have the tools, experience, precedent or political environment to provide strategic direction for a higher education agenda.

Higher education, on the other side, generally lacks incentives to tailor its agenda to meet the expectations of states and the public. Clear public priorities should be agreed on, such as encouraging K-12 reform, ensuring availability of appropriate programs in locations around the state, and developing a plan for accommodating enrollment growth and changing student needs. Then, state officials need to establish an environment in which higher education will respond to these priorities.

Instead, faculty are rewarded for research and scholarship in service to their particular field and for publishing independent work. Administrators are rewarded for improving the national prestige of their institutions — often by winning football games or getting major donations for the college. Colleges, like hospitals, have not had to compete for "clients" on the basis of services that really matter most to the students. Consumer information about what really happens to students at the college and university level is not generally available.

The reward structures built into existing policies and institutional practices are often out of sync with many things we really need to value and encourage. Faculty should be rewarded for good teaching, for service to the community and the entire institution, and not just for specialized research. Administrators and institutional leaders should be rewarded for undertaking new challenges and meeting public needs, not simply for protecting past practices and enhancing prestige. And colleges and universities should be recognized for how well they serve students and support the learning process, not for the degree of selectivity and number of credit hours generated.

But to change these reward structures will require reshaping the incentives built into existing policies and practices. For example, in many states, higher education has become a single line item in the state budget, which permits institutions to escape some very important scrutiny — and responsibility — for service to the public that invests in them. While the single line item insulates

individual higher education institutions from political battles over funding, it should not excuse any institution from accountability for results that justify the investment of public resources. Higher education agendas will differ from state to state, but the need for a connection between institutional and state objectives does not. The challenge of governors is to bring state and institutional objectives into some alignment without infringing on the important academic freedoms of colleges and universities.

Finally, higher education can provide the foundation for strong communities through a real commitment to values and priorities. Colleges and universities are centers for cultural, civic and intellectual activity. Instead of being isolated from the surrounding communities, colleges and universities should be the hub for local deliberation about public issues, solving problems and addressing other public needs. Higher education should seek ways to be a public resource — for example, to help improve education at all levels, design alternatives for welfare and correctional programs, and ensure that the local workforce is prepared with skills appropriate for the local economy.

We need an ethic and a set of practices that reinvent the concept of service to society and the public such as was built into the concept of land-grant universities. This ethic should apply to all institutions.

3 Link quality and accountability

Ultimately, much of the growing concern over higher education boils down to a simple question: What is the quality of services provided and what is the return on our investment?

The national elections in late 1994 demonstrated, I believe, that the public expects responsiveness — and more important, effectiveness — from government, not a certain slate of policies or partisan programs. The public also wants government to be smaller, less expensive and more cost-conscious. Government must be able to demonstrate the effectiveness and efficiency of its work. Public higher education, despite its traditional isolation from government, will not escape this demand.

Many Americans already are questioning the value of a traditional four-year degree, particularly when the costs keep rising and the degree does not necessarily lead to a job after college. And while postsecondary enrollments are growing, many Americans are turning to education programs that are organized differently (on weekends or during evenings) and can better demonstrate the skills and knowledge students will gain as a result.

Too much of higher education has become rutted in patterns that are not very responsive to the public or its leaders. And too many public and business leaders have concluded that higher education is beyond their influence and, therefore, not of direct interest. Too often, higher education is perceived to be the business of faculty and academic leadership only and too complex to be influenced very effectively by anybody. Public leaders, particularly my fellow governors, are beginning to recognize these problems and, in so doing, are being challenged to rethink their support for the system and structures that exist. That support already has begun to fade among some leaders, and it will continue to fade until we acknowledge and act on the underlying challenges.

As state leaders, we have not done a good job of holding institutions accountable for the kinds of results that we really care about or the quality that counts for students, parents or states as a whole. In Colorado, I have no way to measure effectively the "value added" by the academic experience at most public institutions, especially in terms that are meaningful to students and parents or relevant to public policy. If I were asked by a student or parent to explain which of my state's institutions would offer the best learning experience, I could not answer without relying on standard measures that do not say much about the actual learning experience. And when I allocate public resources, I likewise have little reliable information to use. It is not necessarily a state's job to do this measuring, but it is in the public interest to see that such information is available.

Traditionally, higher education has assessed the quality of an institution by input measures such as the number of Ph.D.'s among the faculty, the number of books in the library, the cost of attendance, the difficulty of being admitted and its "prestige ranking." But these factors say nothing about the dedication of the faculty to teaching, the relevance of academic work to public needs, the actual value that is *added* to one's life through classroom experience or the value of the institution to the state. Institutions that propose to be undergraduate teaching institutions, for instance, ought to focus on, and be held accountable for, the quality of undergraduate learning.

Information must be available for prospective students to answer the question: "What happens to a student like me at an institution like this?" before they invest in it. Given this information, students then can judge the value of the program, what it offers that others do not and whether the price corresponds with the value. States should answer the same types of questions before continuing to invest public resources. Political leaders need new strategies for working with higher education to improve lines of accountability, while also taking steps to free institutions from

unnecessary state rules and regulations that hinder their effectiveness.

Obviously, this task is not as simple as just comparing teaching in one classroom with that in another. At the same time, we cannot say all teaching is equally effective when we know it is not. Working with higher education, I believe we can identify appropriate and useful ways to measure levels of quality.

In short, we need to agree that quality and accountability *are* linked, particularly for social institutions as important as colleges and universities; if not, higher education may become increasingly disconnected from society, while our demands for accountability focus on those things less important than true quality.

Making Quality Count

To address the challenges in these three areas, educators and public leaders must be willing to seek answers to some tough questions:

- Are we sufficiently clear about public expectations and our own quality standards for teaching, learning and research?
- Are we providing the best value possible in return for the public dollars invested?
- Are we confident about the effectiveness and productivity of our institutions, and are we able to measure and monitor the quality of the results and services?

Making quality count in higher education must be a shared responsibility between political leaders and institution and system leaders. Together, we need to ensure our institutions are responding to students, employers, business leaders and others. We need to take steps to connect institutional priorities with public priorities. Governors and legislators need to regain an ability to work constructively with higher education, to measure without micromanaging, to communicate without dictating and to clarify a state agenda that is principled and directed.

Our significant investment in higher education simply must pay high returns for individuals and for society as a whole. And to make sure these dividends are high, we need to make sure quality counts. If we agree that quality counts, we must accept these challenges and work together to find new answers.

Chapter 2

TOWARD COMMON GROUND: Political, Business and Education Leaders' Views on Quality Undergraduate Education

Threats to the quality of American colleges and universities concern policymakers, educators, business leaders and the public at large. Will funding shortfalls and rising costs undermine U.S. higher education's claimed status as "best in the world?" Are colleges and universities becoming increasingly disconnected from society? Are they actively restructuring to maintain quality under changed and challenging conditions, as other large public and private enterprises are being forced to do? Are they giving high-enough priority to undergraduate education and student learning?

Such questions are at the center of a growing debate over the concept of "quality" itself — how quality should be defined in higher education, how it can be measured and monitored, and how it can be sustained and enhanced. Many states are entering this debate through performance measures, accountability reporting, incentive funding and other means aimed at enhancing quality, particularly in undergraduate education. Spurred by such questions, the higher education community itself has taken unprecedented steps to examine its own quality mechanisms, chiefly the time-honored practice of voluntary institutional accreditation.

At a January 1994 meeting in Tucson, Arizona, the newly formed National Policy Board for Higher Education Institutional Accreditation (NPB) agreed to pursue significant changes in "institutional accreditation," the traditional means for certifying and enhancing quality through voluntary self-regulation among colleges and universities. The NPB also agreed that steps must be taken to increase accreditation's credibility with, and value to, the public. Subsequently, NPB appointed working groups to draft new accreditation standards and procedures. This work was undertaken primarily by people from within the higher education community — accrediting agency staff, national higher education association leaders — people with expertise to contribute and decisions to make. But they are "insiders" whose work can be strengthened by voices from outside higher education and activities that help to articulate the underlying public interests.

To examine more closely the perspectives of various parties to this debate and give voice to the public interest, ECS conducted a series of focused conversations in 1994 with support from the Johnson Foundation and The Pew Charitable Trusts, and in cooperation with the NPB, the National Governors' Association and the National Conference of State Legislatures. These discussions included an initial conference at the Wingspread Center in Racine, Wisconsin, involving elected officials, higher education leaders, members of the accreditation community and business leaders.

The conference was followed by a series of 15 focus groups at five locations across the country. The focus groups included education policymakers, business leaders, college and university leaders, students and representatives of regional accrediting associations.

While considerable common ground around quality undergraduate education is apparent, deep perceptual differences exist among these groups. People outside higher education often view it as unwilling or unable to change. For policymakers, this is expressed in terms of frustration with their own inability to "get a handle on higher education" and how it works. For institutional leaders, on the other hand, conversations about quality often begin with general rejection of the premise on which such questions are raised. They are defensive about engaging in discussions that in their view are dominated by "finding fault with higher education" rather than identifying its accomplishments and deficiencies in a more balanced fashion. Such differences become increasingly apparent when the discussions shift to concrete mechanisms for future quality assurance. Results from the rich and sometimes heated discussions of these issues provide the basis for this chapter.

What Is "Quality?"

The specific question posed in these conversations was: "What constitutes quality in undergraduate education?" Early in the conversations, it became clear that substantial

agreement exists on the basic notion and characteristics of quality, although different parties got at the question in different ways. In particular, to virtually all parties drawn from outside colleges and universities, quality resided less in institutional attributes than in student outcomes — attainments most visible, in the words of one policymaker, after college in "what happens next." External parties also noted specific individual "returns" from education in the form of increased income and social mobility, and important social returns on investment in the form of better-prepared workers and citizens. One elected official said the primary purpose of undergraduate instruction should be to "expand options and improve the quality of life."

College and university leaders did not disagree substantially with these sentiments, but to achieve these ends they emphasized the importance of an institution's resources, such as the qualifications of its faculty and adequacy of its "academic assets," such as libraries and computing facilities. Many also rejected restricting the definition of quality to undergraduate education, pointing out that institutional merit also may be assessed on the basis of research products and public service. Some institutional leaders entirely rejected the notion of overall quality standards, arguing that different colleges and universities were established for different purposes and should be assessed only in terms of attaining their *own* distinctive goals. Above all, they emphatically opposed schemes that might rank, or even compare, quality of colleges and universities.

Specific responses to the question of "what is quality undergraduate education" clustered around two distinct themes. One addressed **abilities** and **attributes** of college graduates. The other embraced particular aspects of the **collegiate experience** and some specific ways in which colleges and universities, whatever their available resources, choose to "do their business."

Desirable student outcomes, noted by participants from inside, as well as outside, higher education, include the following:

- ***Higher-order, applied problem-solving abilities.*** Though superficially resembling the kinds of skills labelled "critical thinking" inside academic circles, the particular abilities noted are far more practical. Particularly for people outside the higher education system, it is not enough that students simply *possess* analytical skills; they should be able to *use* these skills in complex, real-world settings. Especially valued are creativity and resourcefulness — skills not typically captured by organized instruction. Qualities such as "thinking on one's feet," being a "reflective practitioner," "finding the right problems to solve," "identifying new solutions" or "weaving together a diverse set of thoughts to create a new thought" involve a high level of practical creativity. Business leaders did **not** emphasize technical skills or knowledge in a specific field, provided that these problem-solving abilities are present. One said, for example, "we can stick the insurance knowledge in their heads." Institutional leaders, in contrast, gave significantly more importance to specialized, discipline-based training as central both to desirable student results and overall institutional quality.
- ***Enthusiasm for continuous learning.*** While institutional leaders expressed this goal as "lifelong learning," others expanded this attribute to include a mixture of actual practice. Especially important are the skills and inclination to cope with changing circumstances — both on the job and in one's own life. Equally emphasized were the abilities to access new information and learn how to do new things.

  Some participants placed these skills under the general heading of openness and "trainability." Others outside of education emphasized the principal orientation of college instruction — whether technical or traditional — should be placed on an individual's "eventual job," in contrast to the conventional focus of the "first (entry-level) job." It is important to note that few institutional leaders appeared to accept that ensuring students are prepared for continuous learning, when so broadly defined, is necessarily an outcome that colleges can or should promise to provide.
- ***Interpersonal skills, including communication and collaboration.*** For business leaders, the importance of interpersonal skills reflects their perceptions about the changing nature of work. Oral communication skills are at a premium, needed for effective teamwork and communication with non-specialists. Listening and mutual assistance also are required. College and university leaders also valued communication skills, but seemed to assume that these outcomes result from the presumed "collegial" environment on campuses.

  Policymakers and business leaders often contrasted the interpersonal attributes needed in their own work with the individualized, competitive modes typical of current collegiate culture. As one business leader put it, referring to his own corporate context, "at our company, we don't like stars."
- ***A strong sense of responsibility for personal and community action.*** For policymakers and business leaders alike, this widely expressed theme involved personal integrity, as well as ethical and civil behavior. Noted examples include basic honesty, following through on customer or co-worker needs, maintaining "collective property," acting responsibly, participating in public

service activities and volunteer work and being an informed citizen. One CEO commented that "these things don't just bear on my business, they bear on my future." Again, these sentiments were shared by institutional leaders, but were not often articulated as necessary college outcomes.

- ***Ability to bridge cultural and linguistic barriers.*** Frequently referring to "multi-culturalism" and "global awareness," education and policy leaders agreed an important college outcome should be "transcendence of one's own parochial world view." At the core of this attribute are awareness of and respect for ethnic and national differences. Additionally, most parties mentioned that foreign- or second-language skills are required for intercultural communication.

  Business leaders and policymakers viewed diversity, like problem solving, as considerably more practice-oriented than institutional leaders. Most emphasized more than just awareness of difference or expressions of tolerance, calling instead for actual **experience** in dealing with diversity. One participant said the college experience should provide students with explicit practice in "what the next century is going to be like."

- ***A well-developed sense of "professionalism."*** Policymakers and business leaders placed much more emphasis on this attribute than institutional leaders. However, some components of professionalism resemble traditional liberal education outcomes. Included here are such characteristics as self-discipline and the ability to "understand and work through an organizational structure to get things done."

  The aspect of professionalism farthest from the realm of traditional academic outcomes is the expectation of "civility" (including appropriate dress and behavior in social settings), frequently mentioned by corporate and political leaders as a desirable (and "too often missing") outcome of undergraduate education.

While student outcomes were paramount to defining quality undergraduate education, distinctive institutional attributes also were identified as important ingredients. For business and political leaders, these could not substitute for student outcomes as the "bottom line" of institutional quality, although their presence, in the words of one, might "ensure that the conditions for quality exist." Such quality-oriented institutional characteristics include:

- ***Student-centeredness.*** All discussion participants agreed this orientation must permeate institutional culture, rather than simply be present as an element of instruction. Participants in one focus-group conversation concluded "responsiveness to the needs of students should be at the core of an institution's mission."

  Specific features of such a culture include a faculty highly committed to teaching and personally attentive to students, a focus on the development of the whole student and readily available support services designed to ensure student success.

  The emphasis placed on these features differed significantly among participants. For policymakers and business leaders, commitment and mission issues were paramount and visible in investments made in specific functions, such as lower-division instruction or determining students' needs. For students, the actual delivery of these services was most important, particularly the provision of accurate (and often outcomes-based) consumer information upon which to base important education choices. All participants agreed, however, that student satisfaction with the higher education experience is the bottom line of student-centeredness — a fact that might be visible in high rates of student retention. One participant stated that institutional success in this area ultimately should result in "high holding power for students."

  Wingspread Conference participants, in particular, argued that institutions should have a statement of intended learning outcomes developed and continuously updated with input from all those affected — a statement that is fully accepted by the entire institutional community, communicates expectations to students, provides clear direction for student assessment and is checked regularly against actual practice to ensure desired outcomes are being achieved.

- ***Commitment to specific "good practices" in instruction.*** Agreement on this attribute was widespread and embraced instructional features already prominent in discussions about undergraduate education reform. Many participants explicitly mentioned the "Seven Principles of Good Practice in Undergraduate Education" (the "Wingspread principles") developed in 1987, including active learning, high expectations and high levels of student involvement (see Chapter 4 for additional references). Given business leaders' specific concern with skills application, high value also was placed on the use of "real world" instructional experiences such as internships or group projects. A final dimension prominently noted was easily accessible "tools of learning" — library and information resources or computing and instructional technology.

- ***"Quality management" practices.*** Often phrased in corporate terms, these features were mentioned by most participants in some way. They agreed that an institution should have a clear set of goals that focus on doing "a few things well." Corporate leaders emphasized that a focused mission is consistent with current

"best practice" in business. But, even more important than institutional goals themselves are the ways goals are communicated to the campus community.

Many participants stressed that "coherence" of goals, incentives and rewards, organizational structures and actual behaviors is the primary indicator of a high-quality, well-focused organization. The presence of effective institutional processes for assessment and self-improvement — as well as evidence that these processes are used to make decisions or investments — also indicates quality. Institutional leaders, however, focused such assessment processes on monitoring the achievement of self-set goals, while policymakers and business leaders strongly emphasized monitoring "consumer" needs and satisfactions. Consistent with the latter, business leaders often referenced "continuous quality improvement" techniques and externally developed standards, such as those developed through the Malcolm Baldridge National Quality Award criteria.

- ***Efficiency and integrity of operation.*** While participants debated the degree to which efficiency and integrity are signs of "quality," they discussed these attributes in virtually every conversation. For policymakers, the prime question was one of cost versus benefit — reflecting the fact that both resource information and outcome data are required to make sound public investment decisions.

Measuring Quality

Although the definition of quality occupied center stage in all conference and focus-group conversations, participants also were asked to offer suggestions about how, once defined, quality should (or should not) be measured. All agreed the concept is complex and cannot be defined in terms of single comparative measures. But business and policy leaders generally were far more willing than college and university leaders to advocate straightforward quantitative indicators of institutional performance.

Participants outlined several principles that should be used to guide any attempt to assess institutional quality. The principles include:

- ***Multiple measures*** are critical because each may reflect different aspects of a given institution's condition or performance; therefore, "indexing" or "profiling" quality along numerous dimensions is appropriate.
- ***Comparative measures*** across institutions would be useful but only if comparisons are made among colleges and universities with similar missions and operating conditions.
- ***Contextual data reporting*** is necessary because it provides consumers with the opportunity to better understand and assess quality differences among institutions in relation to the context in which they operate.
- Information about both ***absolute outcomes*** and the ***educational "value added"*** by colleges and universities is important in reaching overall quality judgments. Participants — particularly those outside higher education — insisted there should be some common meaning to a college degree in terms of basic skills, knowledge levels and other "absolute" outcomes. But they also instinctively understand different institutions vary widely in terms of the academic preparation of students. Thus, the "value added" by a community college, for example, would be different from (and might exceed) the value added by an elite, four-year university. Both types of measures are important.
- ***External sources*** of information about performance are critical, not just to help ensure validity, but also to incorporate different perspectives. These should include the ratings and perceptions of people closely involved, such as students and employers.
- ***Mixed measures*** are important to address both ***desired student outcomes*** and ***institutional attributes***, as well as a mix of ***qualitative*** and ***quantitative measures*** of performance.

Participants also identified specific types of performance measures. Among the most prominent:

- ***The successful and timely completion by students of their educational program,*** most notably graduation, but also progression and non-degree objectives.
- ***Student performance after graduation.*** Participants suggested fairly traditional methods by which to measure post-graduate student performance, including: job placement and performance, employment history and performance in future education, and contributions to community. They also strongly recommended reporting such outcomes on a longitudinal basis — examining not just immediate outcomes but also long-term "paths of development" in career or community contributions.
- ***Direct assessments of graduating students' abilities.*** Most participants cautiously endorsed the notion that an "outcomes-based" definition of quality demands direct assessments of student learning. However, institutional leaders insisted appropriate assessment tools have yet to be developed, and business and policy leaders were generally sympathetic to the need for "authentic" approaches. Indeed, given the emphasis on hands-on experience in discussions about applied problem

solving, authentic assessment approaches appear especially appropriate — particularly if business leaders and employers help design and conduct them.

- ***Inventories of instructional and organizational "good practices."*** Consistent with institutional attributes of quality noted earlier, various types of evidence about instructional and organizational practices would be useful to assess quality, participants said, including:
  - Presence of clear learning goals and expectations of students at all levels
  - Demonstration of institutional self-assessment and monitoring practices (especially those involving feedback from consumers)
  - Information about student access to needed classes and services
  - Measures of student access to faculty and the deployment of faculty to undergraduate instruction.
- ***Direct observation through site visits.*** Most participants concurred that quality measurements would be inadequate without direct observation, given the many limitations of other approaches. Reflecting the kinds of expert judgments associated with the Malcolm Baldridge National Quality Award, one business leader noted that judgments about quality are "always empirical, but not always quantifiable." Most participants felt that observation techniques, in contrast to existing site-visit practices in higher education, should be more standardized and reviewer training required.

A prominent and noteworthy theme throughout the discussions about measuring quality was the need for more active involvement of higher education "outsiders," both as potential sources of information and as eventual consumers of assessment results. Policymakers, business leaders and students especially recommended that employers, graduates and others directly exposed to higher education's "products" be more actively involved in the quality-assessment process. While acknowledging differences in institutional missions and contexts, these outside participants consistently emphasized the need to examine the comparative performance of institutions on appropriate common outcomes. "Diversity across institutions should not be an excuse for non-accomplishment," stated one participant.

Conclusions and Next Steps

Achieving consensus about the definition of quality is only one step toward finding common ground and building a credible process of quality assurance. Wingspread Conference and focus-group participants went further, citing specific consequences that the resulting definitions might have on future assessment and accountability practices. Despite their differences, participants chiseled out some significant areas of agreement, including the following general conclusions:

- ***"Assuring quality" is not, by itself, enough to discharge accountability.*** Some participants (particularly college and university leaders) believed that if higher education could design credible, public mechanisms for assuring the quality of outcomes on its own, external accountability would become unnecessary. Public officials emphatically disagreed, stressing their responsibility to ensure public funds are spent well and public needs addressed. For quality-assurance mechanisms to play a part in accountability, such mechanisms must be recognized as part of a group of approaches focused on such matters as cost-effectiveness, return on investment and the appropriate uses of public funds. This principle is seen as applying equally to state dollars and federal student assistance.
- ***Academic self-regulation should remain a component of any future process of quality assurance.*** Policymakers and business leaders unanimously agreed that self-regulation through peer review and meaningful accreditation should continue as a key part of a national quality assurance system for higher education. But they were insistent that it not operate in isolation. Instead, such processes should involve consultation with and, where appropriate, the active participation of others such as employers and public officials. Policymakers and business leaders also emphasized that such external involvement in self-regulation is not seen as displacing thoughtful self-examination, but rather as a way of assisting it and keeping it honest. "We ought to emphasize self-monitoring, . . . but with the help of a critical friend," explained one participant.
- ***Quality assurance must involve visible common standards.*** While the design and application of commonly understood, commonly monitored and collectively enforced standards would be difficult, all participants outside (and most of those inside) higher education agreed they would be useful. Participants also acknowledged the need to define more explicitly the common meaning and content of a baccalaureate award and to develop adequate assessment tools for commonly valued outcomes and "good practices."
- ***Quality assurance must be done in public and its results reported to the public.*** Nowhere was there more common ground than on this point. People inside and outside higher education agreed quality assessment results must be accessible and relevant to key

constituents. Assessments also must be worth the cost of producing them. Broad public involvement means more than simply "disclosing" the results of a closed process to a passive public. Where appropriate, it demands the active engagement of people involved in making the quality judgments themselves.

Discussion participants also suggested the following ways to address areas of disagreement:

- Individual states should find ways to promote more systematic, extended, face-to-face discussions among higher education leaders, policymakers, employers and students about undergraduate quality and how to attain it.
- States, working in partnership with institutions, must find better ways to communicate information to consumers and the public at large.
- States need to consider more than one approach to quality. For example, one system should report on college and university performance, and a second, equally valued system should promote institutional improvement.

The Wingspread Conference and focus-group discussions underscored the view that an effective system of quality assurance and accountability for higher education appropriately consists of several different entities and processes acting together — including state and federal bodies, accreditation associations and institutions. Each has a legitimate and compelling interest in the effective functioning of all components of such a system. And it is in the interest of all for the system to achieve mutually agreed-upon ends with minimum redundancy. Results of the conversations reported here provide substantial evidence that such quality assurance mechanisms, though laden with challenges, are both necessary and possible.

Chapter 3

WHAT STUDENTS EXPECT FROM UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION: State Roles To Enhance Consumer Information and Accountability

The diverse array of American colleges and universities serves many different students and purposes, a fact widely cited as a primary strength of the nation's higher education system. But this diversity and variability poses challenges for students as they select and assess the postsecondary programs that best meet their needs and education objectives. For policymakers, also, diversity and variability make the construction of effective accountability measures challenging. They must take into account unique institutional missions and varied services to distinctive consumer groups.

If each college and university is different, how much institution-specific information do students need to make appropriate choices, and how can public bodies really know if each institution is doing its job? Despite the acknowledged importance of these questions, the challenges the questions pose continue to hamper the provision of additional "consumer information," as well as state and federal attempts to move measures of accountability beyond simple comparisons of available resources.

With respect to consumer information, higher education differs decisively from its K-12 counterpart because participation in it is elective. Individuals can decide for themselves (or with their children) not only whether to attend, but also where to do so, for how long and to achieve what ends. Reflecting this fundamental condition, a cornerstone of both state and federal policy in higher education historically has been to preserve access and enhance student choice. Faced with actually exercising this choice, however, potential students and their parents often have little real information on which to base decisions. Both state and federal policymakers have legitimate interest in making sure available information is adequate to inform wise consumer decisions and not misleading or inaccurate. These roles reflect the traditional consumer protection functions of government and, more important, the fact that substantial state and federal funding flows to colleges and universities as a consequence of student decisionmaking.

In addition, through direct subsidies to institutions (primarily public colleges and universities) and indirect subsidies in the form of financial aid to students, governments are themselves the largest "consumers" of undergraduate education. Governments, at all levels, have a responsibility to ensure that long-term returns on public investments, as well as short-term results and services provided, are consistent with underlying public needs. This is true particularly for state-level policymakers who make most of the decisions about public funding for higher education.

As a result of these state roles, public policy interest in constructing student-oriented indicators of college and university performance is growing. Measures that reflect what higher education's customers need and value can provide an avenue toward achieving better-informed student choices and improved institutional accountability, both of which can contribute to higher quality education.

Consistent with these themes, this chapter of *Making Quality Count in Undergraduate Education* examines the appropriate roles for consumer information. Based on interviews with students and discussions with focus-group participants, it presents the principal areas of student concern. These areas should receive the highest priority in constructing consumer indicators. In addition, the chapter discusses several technical issues involved in developing consumer indicators and gives examples of indicators used in Virginia, South Carolina, Wisconsin, Colorado and other states.

What is "Consumer Information" for Higher Education?

Students, as consumers of higher education, have two basic questions. The first question — "what will actually happen to me if I enroll in a college or university?" — refers to the specific kinds of experiences and services characteristic of attendance at a given college or university. The second question — "what will I get as a result?" — refers to the specific outcomes or payoffs that can be expected from these experiences.

Unlike the kinds of general performance statistics typically provided by institutions for accountability purposes, the kind of information needed to answer such questions must fit individual circumstances. For example, instead of a general graduation rate, a student really needs to know "what the chances are that a student like me will actually graduate" to make an informed consumer decision. The difference is subtle, but important. Most institutions have the data to construct indicators of this kind, but very few package the data to aid student decisionmaking. Specifically, available information rarely is broken down to reveal the typical experiences and success rates for student groups based on age, prior academic preparation, race, gender or other factors.

Like public officials, students frame their questions in "cost/benefit" terms. But they focus on the costs they will bear directly; students are concerned with the dollar costs of tuition and fees (plus any lost income associated with attendance). Students also define costs in terms of invested time. The latter is particularly important as a consumer issue, because today's more mature, often "non-traditional" students place a far greater value on their time than did students of a generation ago. As a result, they are increasingly intolerant of institutional policies and practices that require them — by design or default — to spend time on what they consider to be unproductive or wasteful activities, whether in the class registration process or in the style of classroom teaching and interaction.

Results of the ECS focus groups revealed that students are concerned about some specific things — areas also consistent with the findings of other student interest studies. These can be summarized under four major headings:

1 Individual outcomes. The "bottom line" for students is the return they are likely to obtain from investing in higher education. Consistent with the views of policymakers and business leaders also interviewed, students placed first priority on "what happens next."

Noted outcomes include the following:

- ***Degrees as credentials***. Most students admit their principal motive for attending a college or university is to earn a credential that will make them more marketable in the workplace. And, at least initially, most believe strongly it is the credential itself that is valuable to employers — not the specific skills and experiences that a particular credential may represent.

  Consistent with this perception, three specific "consumer" issues with respect to credentials, are important. First, students want to know what their chances are of obtaining a credential, and they want information presented in a way that can help them estimate those chances. Second, students want to know how long it likely will take to earn a credential. They are aware that the increasingly long time it takes for today's college students to complete degree programs is partly a matter of choice — the result of both part-time attendance and alternating periods of school and work. But they also are acutely conscious of the ways in which institutions appear to slow down the process by requiring additional graduation credits or by not offering required courses in a timely fashion. Finally, students are interested in what a credential is worth in marketplace terms and whether additional credentials or licensing is required; they fault institutions for not providing this information upfront.

- ***Jobs and careers***. Whether, and at what rates, students completing degree programs obtain employment looms large as a student consumer issue. At the most basic level, students are interested in the kinds of jobs typically associated with particular majors or degrees — a link that in many fields is not obvious and may vary significantly from institution to institution. And, recognizing that career mobility is important, they often are concerned about "next jobs." Finally, as might be expected, students are interested in anticipated salary levels — both initially and in the long term — especially as they relate to incurred education costs and typical student loan debt after graduation.

- ***Skills.*** Skills are valued by students because of their connection with employment. But they also represent a distinct area of concern because the possession of key skills, like credentials, often is seen as a way to ensure career mobility. At the same time, students are aware that continuous skills enhancement is required in today's job environment. As a result, they want to know the ways in which institutions make skill enhancement available to graduates. Most important, they are unwilling simply to accept institutional claims about which skills are important to acquire. The views of employers and testimony of graduates already in the workplace are considered far more credible.

2 Key experiences. While outcomes are of primary interest, students as consumers also are concerned about several aspects of the college experience itself.

Chief among them are:

- ***Access to faculty.*** Many student focus-group participants noted that out-of-class contact with faculty through advising or informal conversations is the most

valued portion of their collegiate experience. Consistent with the findings of 20 years of research on collegiate learning, they believe such contact considerably enhances what they learn. But students also express frustration about lack of access — complaining faculty are not always available as advertised or are apathetic about student needs. Faculty contact, in short, is one of the main things students feel they are paying for and are most disappointed about when they don't receive it. As a result, access to appropriate faculty is probably the single most salient consumer dimension associated with the college experience itself.

- ***"Hands-on" learning experiences.*** Also consistent with research findings about collegiate learning, student participants reported that academic experiences are most effective and rewarding when they involve "real" activity. By this, students mean "active classroom learning" — doing rather than just listening; internships and the acquisition of practical skills (e.g., a number of students mentioned that learning computer skills was perhaps the most important result of attending college). Conversely, students expressed discontent with being forced to take required general education courses that are not visibly "connected to anything" or relevant to their degrees. Ironically (though consistent with some curricular reform proposals), some students reported valuing such courses only when taken **after** they were on their way to completing a degree program.

3 Support services. While students who commute, attend part time and have family or work obligations expressed the strongest opinions, students in general appear to believe both institutional services and consumer information about basic administrative procedures could be improved markedly.

Specific areas of concern include:

- ***Learning support.*** Many students, especially non-traditional students, enter higher education with substantial skills deficiencies and with consequent doubts about their own ability to perform. As a result, they want to be assured that a support system exists if it is needed. They feel that helping students succeed — whatever this entails — should be a regular part of institutional support. As a result, students are somewhat dismayed by programs that stigmatize participation in skills development as being "remedial" or "non-collegiate" in nature or do not award credit for such courses.

  Another important dimension of learning support — related to faculty contact — is advising. Most students value good advising, especially when it is done by faculty members who also are their instructors. But most students are critical of the kinds of advising they actually receive, consistent with the results of numerous national surveys on this topic. When asked to give the single most important thing she wished she had known before enrolling in higher education, one student summarized, "I wish I had known that I would essentially be self-advising."

- ***Personal support.*** Students also expressed considerable interest in the availability and adequacy of a range of personal support services. Among the most prominently noted are career counseling, personal counseling and child care. As might be expected, concerns about such services are especially salient for non-traditional students and are consistent with their need to balance school attendance with other personal obligations. Such students — as well as some traditional students — also are concerned about the manner in which these and other services are delivered. In particular, they value flexible and evening hours of operation which make such services more available to them, given their other obligations.

- ***Understandable and efficient administrative processes.*** Student participants were perhaps most vocal about this dimension of "customer service," believing that most of the basic administrative procedures they experience at their institutions — admissions, registration, financial aid administration, bursar and fee-payment operations, and access to academic records — can be improved. A particular complaint is that colleges and universities tend to regard student time as a "free good" and that few efforts are made to render administrative processes more understandable and efficient for students. They particularly value any institutional efforts to streamline basic administrative processes (such as telephone registration) or to provide them with better information (such as electronic information "kiosks").

4 Costs. Cost questions lurked in the background of all discussions with students.

First, costs provide the common benchmark against which to assess the real value of the other three areas. Information about the actual costs incurred is thus critical in making any consumer decision about adequacy or return.

Second, as noted previously, not all important costs are direct dollar costs. Students are often quite sensitive to the many "opportunity costs" associated with attendance, including the income they might have earned had they worked full time. Consistent with this, they also are conscious that their own principal investment is one of time and energy, and they want to be sure that these are not squandered.

In contrast to other issues, however, students feel better informed about cost than the return side of their own cost/benefit calculus, though they believe additional information could be provided.

Taken together, these four areas of concern constitute some of the most promising areas for the development of appropriate student-oriented consumer indicators for higher education. While the specific contents of these areas may differ somewhat across institutional types, better information in all of these areas would be helpful for virtually every type of student enrolled at all types of colleges and universities.

What is the State Role in Providing "Consumer Information?"

State authorities have two distinct obligations with respect to consumer information. A first obligation is to ensure that individual colleges and universities themselves provide such information to students and prospective students in a regular and usable fashion. But beyond broad conformance with each of the areas of concern noted above, there need be no requirement for common indicators reported to fulfill this obligation. Indeed, given the many legitimate differences among institutions and among student groups, the detailed contents of a "consumer information package" for a community college may differ from that of a four-year, residential university.

But in fulfilling this first obligation, there is an additional requirement to ensure consumer protection. It is a legitimate state role — and one already played by the federal government with respect to accountability for federal student assistance programs — to ensure that any claims made about outcomes or services are both accurate and adequately supported. As is the case for other areas of state-mandated institutional reporting (such as student assessment), an important state role may be to review periodically the kinds of information provided by individual institutions to help guarantee their accuracy and appropriateness. Because this also is a central concern for regional accrediting organizations, states may wish to work in partnership with such organizations to ensure this function is present and operating properly at each institution.

Consistent with consumer protection, a second potential state role is to provide comparable information on institutional performance. While this should be done only in those areas where colleges and universities can be compared legitimately, a number of such areas are appropriate for statistical reporting. They include:

- ***Characteristics of the entering student body,*** including demographics, academic backgrounds and type of attendance (e.g., full time versus part time, commuting, etc.). This information is straightforward, but is especially important from a student point of view because it indicates who one's student peers will be.
- ***Typical educational experiences*** encountered in the first two years, including likely introductory course class size, proportion of such classes taught by regular faculty, percentage of incoming students placed into and completing basic-skills developmental courses in math and writing, and other such indicators. This information is more difficult to obtain and interpret, but is powerful from a consumer standpoint — it paints a picture about what attendance will actually look like.
- ***Immediate employment opportunity outcomes*** for vocational and professional programs, including information about the rates at which graduates find employment in related fields, satisfaction of employers with graduate performance as employees, and rates at which graduates pass applicable licensure or certification examinations. For non-vocational programs, students are interested in knowing the kinds of jobs that students find after graduation and the extent to which what they learned in college is important for job performance.
- ***Student and graduate satisfaction*** with both the collegiate experience and its outcomes, including ratings of specific strengths and weaknesses. Indicators of past customer satisfaction have proved to be among the most powerful forms of consumer information available in industries other than higher education. And results of customer surveys are generally accorded high credibility — especially if conducted by a third party.

It is important to note that while different audiences may agree about the importance of a particular area of performance or experience, the actual evidence they are willing to accept as credible about the quality of this area may vary substantially. Generally speaking, audiences from outside colleges and universities tend to rely first on evidence gathered from sources **outside** colleges and universities. They consider credible the testimony of employers, alumni and students.

As a result, while consumer information provided by individual institutions can and should be drawn from a variety of sources — including an institution's own records — the kinds of consumer information reported directly by the state should rest principally on data collected at the state level. For example, the student "unit-record" enrollment databases maintained by several states for their public institutions constitute a powerful third-party data source. Such databases can be used directly to generate standard descriptive statistics on student characteristics at each institution, as well as limited outcomes information about

graduation rates and degree completion times. Increasingly, such records can be supplemented by computer links with state-level databases outside higher education to obtain additional useful outcomes indicators. For instance, many states now have the capability to electronically track employment histories of public institution graduates by tapping into statewide unemployment insurance wage-record files.

Another substantial source for such information is standard surveys administered to current and former students. States with large, multi-campus higher education systems, such as California and New York, conduct such surveys as a quality-assurance mechanism. Such surveys are being modified to capture information on the incidence of instructional "good practice" and on how well particular programs and services are provided. In addition, serious attention is being given to how the results of such surveys, originally compiled for purposes of accountability and internal planning, can be reconfigured as consumer information.

The table below presents sample student "consumer information" indicators that can be constructed from state-level data sources. They illustrate the potential diversity of these kinds of indicators. Because the primary intent of both institution-specific and state-level information is to inform consumer choice, considerable attention should be devoted to how it is presented. This type of consumer information "template" could be developed for all states, taking into account the status and potential of existing student databases, the needs to be served and the appropriate roles of institutions and state authorities in developing and providing this information.

As emphasized previously, any student consumer indicator must be constructed from the standpoint of an individual student. Second, it is important to determine what kind of information presentation works for different audiences.

Examples of State-Level Student "Consumer Information" Indicators

TYPES	SAMPLE INDICATOR	SOURCE OF DATA
Individual outcomes:		
Graduation completion	% Completing within X-time by demographic group	Unit Record
Job placement	% Placed in field by program	State Wage Data
Further education	% of two-year starters obtaining four-year credential (for two-year institutions)	Unit Record
Skills development	% of employed former students reporting oral communication skills important on the job and were enhanced by institution	Survey
Experiences:		
Faculty contact	Frequency of out-of-class faculty contact/week	Survey
Instructional experience	Probability of at least one class < 15 as freshman	Unit record
	Reported alumni/former student satisfaction with instruction provided	Survey
Support services:		
Learning support	% of new freshmen needing math remediation by demographic group and later success in college math	Unit record
Other services	% of students using/satisfied with specific support services	Survey
Cost/affordability	Actual student cost of attendance	Fiscal records
	Average $ value of unmet need	State aid records

Finally, a mix of comparative and institution-specific information may be most helpful. Wisconsin, for instance, provides a range of comparative "consumer" statistics together with institution-specific narratives and pictures in its systemwide *View Book* for prospective students. Other states have developed similar approaches, although most still lack an explicit and comprehensive plan to provide a full-range of consumer information.

Recommended State Roles

What kinds of actions might states consider to promote and develop better information to inform student choice in higher education? Based on input from students and the experience of states already engaged in at least some of those activities, the following recommendations are appropriate:

- ***Periodically monitor for appropriateness and accuracy the kinds of "consumer information" institutions produce for prospective students. An institution's mission and typical student clientele must be taken into consideration.*** Existing state assessment policies, which generally require institutions to report how they use information on student and institutional performance, provide an excellent vehicle for accomplishing this activity.
- ***Provide technical assistance and policy incentives for institutions to develop better forms of student-oriented consumer information.*** As noted, looking at things from the student point of view is alien to the "expert" cultures of most colleges and universities. Overcoming this mentality cannot be solved by statistics alone, but instead must be approached as part of a comprehensive process of creating a "service-oriented" culture. Statewide workshops and assistance on this topic, as well as budgetary and other incentives for institutions to examine and improve their service orientation, also are needed.
- ***Develop and collect consumer indicators that address the appropriate common functions of all public postsecondary institutions.*** To accomplish this, available databases should be examined to determine if they can be used to construct student-oriented performance indicators of the kinds noted in the preceding table. "Third-party" involvement in collecting the required data adds credibility to this process.
- ***Develop reporting mechanisms in direct consultation with the constituencies they are intended to inform.*** Some states have conducted surveys or focus groups to ensure the concerns of students and other consumers of higher education are reflected in the types of information provided by institutions and statewide agencies.
- ***Make student and employer satisfaction with services and outcomes a visible part of any existing or contemplated institutional performance ratings.*** Information about how satisfied various consumers of higher education are with what they receive provides the kinds of evidence considered most credible by other parties.

Taken together, measures such as these have the potential both to improve accountability and help develop a more flexible and responsive state system of higher education. Information on customer satisfaction historically is lacking among colleges and universities, but can provide an important common measure of performance across all types of institutions. At the same time, the "market" created by customer-oriented performance measures — if consistent with other state policy mechanisms — can help change the current incentive structure embedded in higher education in a direction more favorable to the delivery of effective undergraduate education.

Chapter 4

WHAT RESEARCH SAYS ABOUT IMPROVING HIGHER EDUCATION QUALITY, AND WHAT STATES CAN DO ABOUT IT

Research has some important things to say about higher education quality, which in turn can help inform policies designed to improve higher education. Extensive research on American college students reveals several characteristics of what a high-quality, undergraduate education experience looks like. These characteristics form 12 attributes of **good practice** in delivering undergraduate education. Evidence is strong that when colleges and universities systemically engage in these good practices, student performance and satisfaction will improve. These characteristics also are consistent with many of the things that student focus-group participants said they value in an undergraduate experience.

State governments have several options available to encourage institutions to engage in good practices, including direct intervention, fiscal policies, accountability/reporting policies and technical assistance. These options should address both outcomes and processes, and institutions must understand the particular common ends that higher education is intended to produce.

This chapter summarizes the research and argues that state policies should include mechanisms to ensure conditions exist at all colleges and universities that promote high-quality learning.

Attributes of High-Quality Undergraduate Education

Considerable research on the characteristics of good practice in higher education has resulted in a relatively short list of factors that are likely to provide students with superior learning experiences. Twelve of these factors are identified and summarized below under three major headings: organizational culture, curriculum and instructional practice. Additional information and references on the research on which this list is based are provided at the end of this chapter.

1 Quality begins with an organizational culture that values:

- ***High expectations.*** Students learn more effectively when expectations for learning are placed at high but attainable levels, and when these expectations are communicated clearly from the onset. This principle is based on research indicating that when students are expected to take risks and perform at high levels, they make greater efforts to succeed. If this kind of encouragement is absent, students tend to choose "safe" learning alternatives that allow little room for developing their full potential. In contrast to conventional notions of "academic rigor," however, research indicates that students should not be left simply on their own to reach high standards; instead, both the institution and its faculty members must set high expectations and make active efforts to help students meet them.
- ***Respect for diverse talents and learning styles.*** Students come to college with vastly different backgrounds, levels of preparation and previous experiences. It also is true that regardless of background, different students may learn most effectively in quite different ways. Good practice demands carefully designing curricula and instructional efforts to meet these diverse backgrounds and learning styles. Not only should individual ways of learning be respected and students allowed to capitalize on their strengths, but diversity itself should be harnessed for the insights it can provide on the subject matter taught. Instructional approaches that actively tap prior student and faculty experiences, and highlight the differences in those experiences, can be particularly effective.
- ***Emphasis on the early years of study.*** A consensus is emerging that the first years of undergraduate study — particularly the freshman year — are critical to student success. This idea partly reflects the fact that the transition from high school to postsecondary study represents a major discontinuity in both expectations and behavior for most students. Not only are standards higher, but students also are expected to work harder and make major choices about their course of study. For adult students returning to the unfamiliar world of postsecondary study after many absent years, the shock of

transition can be particularly abrupt. Yet, the pattern of resource allocation at most colleges and universities strongly favors upper-division work. Comprehensive efforts to integrate first-year students into the mainstream of collegiate experience often are treated as auxiliary activities, unconnected to faculty and core academic experiences, just the reverse of what a growing body of research indicates as "best practice."

2 A quality undergraduate curriculum requires:

- ***Coherence in learning.*** Students succeed best in developing higher-order skills (e.g., critical thinking, effective written and oral communication, problem solving) when such skills are reinforced throughout their education program. This means, at a minimum, that students should be presented with a set of learning experiences that consist of more than merely a required number of courses or credit hours. Instead, the curriculum should be structured in a way that sequences individual courses to reinforce specific outcomes and consciously directs instruction toward meeting those ends.
- ***Synthesizing experiences.*** Students also learn best when they are required to synthesize knowledge and skills learned in different places in the context of a single problem or setting. Such experiences can occur appropriately at multiple points in a student's career and should not be confined to upper-division or baccalaureate programs.
- ***Ongoing practice of learned skills.*** A common research finding in K-12 and postsecondary education is that unpracticed skills atrophy quickly. This is particularly the case with such core skills as computation and writing, which, if not reinforced, will inevitably deteriorate without use. Good practice consistent with this principle requires multiple opportunities to exercise higher-order communication (written and oral), critical thinking, problem solving and basic quantitative skills. It also requires that students demonstrate such skills at appropriate levels as a condition for graduation.
- ***Integrating education and experience.*** Classroom learning is both augmented and reinforced by multiple opportunities to apply what is learned. In professional curricula and programs, opportunities for this abound through formal practice, internships or cooperative education arrangements, but they generally are lacking for undergraduate education as a whole. These kinds of settings are those in which the greatest amount of learning often occurs and where student interest is highest.

3 Quality undergraduate instruction builds in:

- ***Active learning.*** At all levels, students learn best when they are given multiple opportunities to actively exercise and demonstrate skills. For example, students learn more when they participate in frequent discussions of presented class material, produce considerable written work and apply learned material to new settings or contexts, rather than when they simply listen to lectures. Rather than being based entirely on information recall, student assessment should require active demonstration of synthesis and application.
- ***Assessment and prompt feedback.*** Frequent feedback to students on their own performance also is a major contributor to learning. Typically in college classrooms, students receive little formal feedback on their work until well into the term. Learning is enhanced when students are provided with information about their performance, both within courses and through advisement processes and integrative experiences that give them an opportunity to assess more broadly what they have learned. Early and frequent assessment at the classroom level also allows faculty to determine the different abilities and backgrounds that are present among students and may suggest strategies for dealing with this diversity.
- ***Collaboration.*** Students learn better when engaged in a team effort rather than working on their own. Teamwork increases active involvement and provides multiple opportunities for feedback. At the same time, it actively reinforces communication and problem-solving skills. Moreover, it is the way the world outside the academy works — a world that students eventually will face. Research also suggests that collaboration is a useful model for faculty/student interaction; rather than being a judge of student performance, the best teachers act as coaches, working with students as joint participants in achieving learning goals.
- ***Adequate time on task.*** Research also confirms that more time devoted to learning yields greater payoffs in terms of what and how much is learned. How an institution defines its expectations for the ways students and instructors use their time can powerfully influence the quality of learning that occurs. At the same time, visibly emphasizing time on task helps students learn how to plan and manage their time more effectively and how to focus their energy.
- ***Out-of-class contact with faculty.*** Frequency of academic, out-of-class contact between faculty members

and students is a strong determinant of both program completion and effective learning. Knowing well a few faculty members enhances students' intellectual commitment and encourages them to think about their own values and future plans. Through such contact, students are able to see faculty members less as experts than as role models for ongoing learning.

Multiple sources of research suggest these 12 factors, listed in the table below, are important individually and are mutually reinforcing. It is difficult for a college or university to be engaged seriously in one of these activities without being engaged in most of them. Also highly correlated with such practices are "student-centered" faculty attitudes. It is important to note that the majority of these practices are regarded highly by students themselves, and the institutions that engage in them receive higher satisfaction ratings from their graduates than those that do not.

Attributes of Quality Undergraduate Education: What the Research Says

- Quality begins with an organizational culture that values:
  - High expectations
  - Respect for diverse talents and learning styles
  - Emphasis on early years of study
- A quality curriculum requires:
  - Coherence in learning
  - Synthesizing experiences
  - Ongoing practice of learned skills
  - Integrating education and experience
- Quality instruction builds in:
  - Active learning
  - Assessment and prompt feedback
  - Collaboration
  - Adequate time on task
  - Out-of-class contact with faculty

Policy Mechanisms That Support Quality Higher Education

States use two types of policy tools to address issues of higher education quality and to induce institutions to engage in desired good practices in undergraduate education. One type is intended to encourage institutions themselves to make changes in the ways they operate. Prominent among these alternatives are assessment programs consistent with local instructional goals, and funding mechanisms designed to promote experimentation with new forms of instructional delivery. A second policy type is intended to ensure and improve the level of quality present across all institutions. These alternatives include assessments and performance indicators that measure common outcomes and practices at all institutions, and investment strategies such as performance funding or categorical grants that require institutions to engage in specific activities.

The most common types of policy tools include:

- ***Direct intervention.*** This policy tool is rarely used because it involves the direct use of state policy to mandate the way instruction is delivered or the ways instructional resources are deployed. Prominent examples of this approach are:
  - ***Mandated instructional practice or curricular content.*** States or university systems may establish policies to ensure that certain topics are taught or instructional practices engaged in, especially in the basic skills portion of the undergraduate curriculum. Florida's "Gordon Rule," which requires all freshmen in state institutions to write 24,000 words during their first year of enrollment is a prominent example. Less prescriptive is Arkansas' provision that all students take a general education curriculum of specified length, with exposure provided to a specified range of courses. Finally, state requirements for particular curricular sequences or structures are quite common in several specialized undergraduate curricula — most notably nursing and teacher education.
  - ***Mandated faculty workloads or requirements.*** More commonly, states may specify how instructional resources (particularly faculty) are deployed — or place clear restrictions on their deployment. Several states, for instance, require non-native-English-speaking faculty to pass an English-proficiency test or specify a minimum teaching workload for full-time faculty in public institutions.

These and similar approaches are seldom used because they deal only with limited parts or aspects of the undergraduate experience and cannot ensure quality in other important areas. Nor can mandates alone ensure how the measures are carried out in practice. They also are

viewed as intrusive in terms of faculty and institutional responsibility for ensuring quality.

- ***Fiscal incentives.*** Far more common are policies that use financial reward or directed investment to ensure institutions engage in valued practices or attain valued outcomes. The most common alternatives include:
  - ***Performance funding.*** In their purest form, performance funding mechanisms reward institutions directly for attaining particular targets or objectives. Tennessee's long-standing performance funding program is centered heavily on undergraduate instruction and provides institutions with up to an additional 5.5% of their base funding for outcomes such as student achievement in general education and the major field (both measured by nationally normed standardized tests), as well as other statistical measures of quality. Missouri and New York reward institutions for the number of degrees actually completed and for each degree granted to minority students. Other variants of performance funding reward institutions for reaching specific targets agreed upon in negotiation between the state and individual institutions. This allows institutions with different missions to be rewarded for appropriately different types of attainment and performance.
  - ***Categorical funding.*** Categorical funding directs resources toward specified institutional investments and practices, and restricts expenditures to such practices. Florida and Texas, for example, provide funds explicitly to institutions that reduce lower-division English class sizes to promote writing achievement. Minnesota provides funding to institutions for investments in computing and instructional technology. Minnesota's "Q-7" program directs funding toward the development of senior "capstone experiences" (for example, a senior research thesis or individual project) in all state university undergraduate curricula. Typically, such funds not only carry direct expenditures, but also require institutions to report actual progress in engaging in such practices (such as reporting class sizes or numbers of capstone experiences).
  - ***Grant-like funding.*** Probably the most common addition-to-base incentive mechanism used by states to address higher education improvement is the establishment of competitive grants for particular types of programs. New Jersey's Governor's Challenge Grants of the mid-1980s, Ohio's Program Excellence component of its Funds for Excellence approach, Colorado's Programs of Excellence grants and Virginia's Funds for Excellence program are examples of this relatively non-directive approach. Such approaches work well when the goal is substantial institutional experimentation with new quality-improvement techniques. Such funding mechanisms work even better, however, when coupled with a strong evaluation requirement to determine actual outcomes of those investments and when they include an active dissemination network to ensure that successful programs are known and imitated in other institutions and programs.
- ***Accountability mechanisms.*** Most states require specific forms of accountability with respect to undergraduate education — either through direct legislative mandates or policies established by governing or coordinating boards. The two most common policy mechanisms used in this arena are:
  - ***Institutional assessment mandates.*** Nearly two-thirds of the states require all public institutions periodically to assess undergraduate outcomes and report what they have learned (and what they intend to do about what they have learned) to a state agency and the public. The vast majority of these programs allow institutions to set their own goals for assessment and specify the particular forms of assessment they will use to demonstrate or determine goal achievement. Most of these policies, however, specify the particular areas that institutions should assess — for instance, general education, achievement in the major field, retention and graduation rates, and student and alumni satisfaction.
  - ***Common performance measures.*** About 15 states require all public institutions to report results on a common set of statistical performance indicators largely centered on undergraduate education. Performance indicator systems of this kind generally include input and good practice measures, as well as outputs. For example, South Carolina requires institutions to report on the number of undergraduates directly involved in faculty research activities, and Tennessee reports the proportions of graduating seniors involved in capstone or other integrative experiences. Several states, including California, New York, North Carolina and Tennessee, conduct common customer satisfaction surveys of their graduates or currently enrolled students.

State experience has shown that both kinds of accountability mechanisms are best used in tandem with other policy mechanisms. For instance, Virginia examines the results of varied institutional assessment programs across the state to determine if any patterns are present to guide the next round of awards under its competitive

"Funds for Excellence" programs. Illinois consistently has used such information as part of its statewide planning and priority-setting efforts.

- ***Technical assistance.*** State agencies also may disseminate good practice information or provide direct assistance to institutions in improving undergraduate education delivery. As examples of this last type of policy tool, some state boards sponsor periodic conferences or workshops on topics of undergraduate improvement. New Jersey's annual multi-cultural and gender education conference and its Institute for Teaching and Learning or Washington's Center for Teaching and Learning are prominent examples. Often such conferences are underwritten by state boards or legislative grants, but are administered by consortia of institutions. Examples include the annual, statewide assessment conferences held in Colorado, Washington, Virginia and South Carolina.

  Technical assistance provisions can be a helpful follow-up to both categorical and grant-like funding approaches. In Minnesota, for example, technical assistance opportunities on topics related to the use of instructional technology are designed to work in tandem with categorical funding approaches. In Virginia, periodic statewide conferences are held to disseminate the lessons learned by institutions in piloting new programs under Funds for Excellence.

A major lesson has emerged from years of research and state-level experimentation with mechanisms to improve higher education: **policy tools are best employed in combination with, and in the presence of, an explicit statewide vision and set of expectations for undergraduate education.** Additionally, higher education remains relatively distant and unaffected by direct state action, in comparison to the direct influences of academic departments and individual faculty members acting in relative isolation. As a result, the principal function of state policy is to **create appropriate and properly aligned incentives for common action** at the institutional level — incentives that can be recognized and used effectively by institutional leaders to accomplish local change. At the same time, these policies must clearly communicate to both institutions and the public that the state considers effective undergraduate education a priority and that institutions will be held accountable for achieving high-quality results.

Additional Resources

The specific attributes of good practice in undergraduate education distilled in this chapter are based on the results of several decades of study about American college students. For readers interested in pursuing this matter further, the key sources that may be of additional interest to policymakers include the following:

- *Involvement in Learning: Realizing the Potential of American Higher Education* (U.S. Department of Education, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1984). This product of a prominent study group composed of higher education researchers was organized around three themes intended to reform undergraduate education: involve students, set high expectations and provide frequent feedback on performance. These themes, as well as the report's detailed recommendations, were based on specific findings from the research literature.
- *Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education* (Wingspread, Racine, WI: The Johnson Foundation, Inc., 1989). The result of a conference of higher education researchers and practitioners, this short list of empirically based principles for instruction has been highly influential in shaping new approaches to pedagogy in college classrooms. The principles, and two inventories that support them, provide excellent starting points for shaping statewide discussions about what constitutes "good practice."
- *How College Affects Students: Findings and Insights from Twenty Years of Research* (E.T. Pascarella and P.T. Terenzini, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc., Publishers, 1991). This massive volume provides the single most comprehensive presentation of what is known about college impact. It updates and expands the previous standard work, *The Impact of College on Students* (K. Feldman and T. Newcomb, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc., Publishers, 1969), which also remains of value. Other seminal primary sources that provide grounding for many of the points made in this paper include: *What Matters in College?* (A.W. Astin, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc., Publishers, 1993), *Education and Identity* (A.W. Chickering, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc., Publishers, 1972), *Involving Colleges* (G. Kuh, et al., San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc., Publishers, 1990), and *Liberating Education* (Z. Gamson & Associates, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, Inc., Publishers, 1984).
- *The Effect of State Policy on Undergraduate Education* (Denver, CO: ECS, 1993), one of a number of publications resulting from the ECS "State Policy and Collegiate Learning" (SPCL) project. Other relevant reports resulting from SPCL include: *A Framework for Evaluation State Policy Roles in Improving Undergraduate Education* (Denver, CO: ECS, 1994) and *Using Fiscal Policy to Achieve State Education Goals* (J. Folger and D. Jones, Denver, CO: ECS, 1993). Earlier but still useful variations on these themes are provided by *Levers*

for Change: The Role of State Government in Improving the Quality of Postsecondary Education (P.T. Ewell, Denver, CO: ECS, 1985) and *Transforming the State Role in Undergraduate Education: Time for a Different View* (Denver, CO: ECS, 1986).

Chapter 5

NEXT STEPS: Quality as a Shared Agenda

Americans can take great pride in their colleges and universities. Private and public institutions, serving a rich diversity of needs and purposes, providing access to a larger proportion of the population than in any other nation, attracting annually thousands of students from foreign countries around the world, recognized for pioneering research and a tradition of public service — surely these are hallmarks of quality higher education that is unsurpassed in the world.

Yet, as Governor Romer argues in his opening to this report, perceptions and questions about quality lie at the heart of many immediate and compelling issues. We cannot make well-reasoned decisions about the rising costs of higher education without being clear about what we are investing in, the quality of the education provided and the likely returns on our investments. We will have little confidence in expanding access to accommodate growing numbers of high school graduates and more diverse adult populations unless we can be confident about their chances of success in college and in the workplace. We cannot comprehend and deal effectively with questions of resource needs and allocations, faculty roles, effective instructional techniques or other complex issues affecting the future of colleges and universities without greater clarity about what we need and expect, without some discussion of the *qualities* of higher education that support its status and value as a national resource.

We face these and other questions about quality as individuals — students, parents and adults — in making decisions about whether and where and why to pursue college, university education, community college, career program or other post-high school education and training. Increasingly, we call on these resources to prepare for entry into a competitive workplace environment, to sharpen or expand our skills and knowledge and to provide the benefits of mobility, citizenship and personal satisfaction associated with advanced levels of education. These individual decisions involving large investments of time and money inevitably reflect judgments about quality.

Romer, articulating the themes and tough choices faced by state political leaders, points out that these same questions about quality are faced in making decisions about public investments in higher education. Given the constraints and competing demands on public resources, no governor or state legislature can expand access without seeking to answer questions about which investments of scarce resources will bring the greatest returns for society. More and more governors and legislators are asking direct questions about the quality of the education experience, its content and methods, the commitment of faculty and institutions, and its relevance to the needs of today's students and tomorrow's society.

Political, business and campus leaders alike question the separation of quality and accountability. Quality in higher education cannot be primarily defined within and by the academy without reference to external expectations and without meaningful evaluative information provided to its constituents, and still satisfy the need for public accountability. And the demand for accountability, when not informed by discussions of real quality and demonstrated by substantial evidence, focuses more and more on the less important, the immediately measurable and easily quantifiable, and less on measures of true value. These factors add urgency and consequences to the growing debate over quality.

The synthesis of external expectations, research on quality undergraduate education and emerging state roles in this report points to several challenges and areas of concern. Each of these areas will require a concerted effort among state officials, college and university leaders, and concerned parties from the private sector and American society overall in order to address the challenges effectively. The challenges include:

- ***Clarify and be more concrete about society's expectations for higher education.*** Greater clarity about expectations will require common meeting grounds where discussion and negotiation can take place across the diverse and legitimate voices of society and the academy — discussions that too often do not even take place. This is the beginning point for being clear about the mutual obligations between colleges and universities and the public at large.
- ***Examine the consistency of current practices and policies with changing public expectations.*** Too many

practices within higher education and state policies imposed from outside are out of date and out of sync with current and future public needs — for example, the heavy reliance on classroom-based instruction supported by state funding policies, while technology-based instruction and distance learning lack comparable support. These conditions lead to the call for restructuring and re-engineering around "customer needs" and quality management, often voiced by business leaders. These out-of-date policies also contribute to the demands for change and more **accountability** by political leaders, who often do not realize that existing public policies structure the incentives and boundaries within which public colleges and universities operate. If changing public expectations requires different institutional responses, the old incentive structures and institutional "maintenance" funding must be closely examined and appropriately redirected.

- ***Achieve better alignment between state needs and the priorities of colleges and universities.*** Becoming more explicit about quality expectations for higher education and removing the barriers to change are only the first steps. More important — and more difficult — is shifting the priorities of higher education toward some new set of goals and objectives. High-quality colleges and universities struggle — periodically if not continuously — with refining their objectives for undergraduate education, and they expend considerable energy and expertise in assessing the results. These are "self-regarding institutions," to use Peter Ewell's encapsulating phrase. But too few states have adopted such a framework, and too few insist that institutions take on this quality assessment and improvement agenda in a serious way. When this is done, colleges and universities often end up focusing on qualities and objectives that are remarkably consistent with the student outcomes and package of "good practices" outlined in this report. Other priorities that frequently emerge from such a process include closer collaboration with K-12 education, improved teacher-education programs (when this is an institutional mission) and partnership with the local economy to address workforce preparation or advanced training needs.

- ***Recognize and adapt to changes in the nature of knowledge and learning in society.*** It is clear that knowledge is expanding and changing rapidly and that individual access to information, self-education and other types of dispersed learning are changing even more radically. Yet, many of our notions of quality education are mired in patterns from the past and reflect little of this expanding knowledge and the potential for individual access. Quality learning and, therefore, quality undergraduate education can no longer be confined to the classroom or to the lecture format and course-specific multiple-choice testing and grading. When used exclusively or primarily, these are poor substitutes for the types of learning and education that now surround us, and they are increasingly inadequate for determining the overall quality of the learning outcomes.

- ***Develop and use better ways to measure and monitor student and institutional performance.*** If the education process often lags behind changing expectations and knowledge, existing measurement and assessment techniques are even further behind. This inhibits quality improvement within traditional curricular settings and for the system as a whole by substituting proxies for student and institutional effort (such as credit hours or faculty-student ratios) to achieve some actual assessment of results and performance. For a world of more rapidly expanding knowledge and open access to learning, we need a system of "competency credits" rather than credit hours, and of meaningful institutional performance indicators rather than prestige or tradition. As this report suggests, direct assessment of student and institutional performance may not be an appropriate state role. But these are appropriate institutional roles, to be done in multiple ways and then summarized through a set of indirect indicators of performance available to students, policymakers and the public.

Clear expectations, consistency with practices, alignment of institutional priorities with public needs, integration of new knowledge and learning methods, and better ways of measuring actual performance are all important aspects of high-quality undergraduate education. These characteristics do not in themselves define quality, but they help set the context in which quality can be defined by colleges and universities and then conveyed to a broader public. This quest for quality needs to be a more open and public undertaking than in the past, which no doubt will cause discomfort in institutions accustomed to a more closed process. But, quality will not be enhanced by a regulatory approach from outside or a compliance response from inside. Quite the opposite, *Making Quality Count* must involve a new process to which many parties contribute and from which all derive benefit.

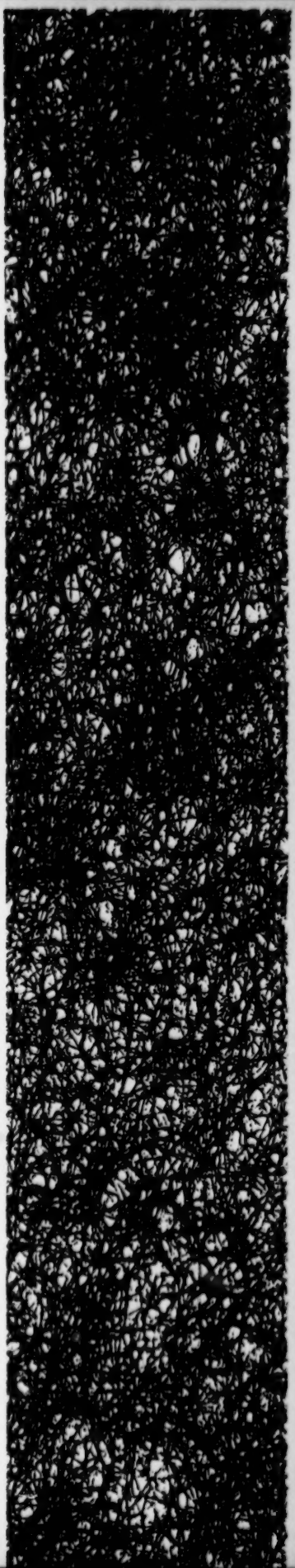
This report will serve as the starting point for several initiatives to help establish such a process and framework for addressing questions of quality in higher education. Romer will work with a small group of governors, legislators and others — a Leadership Council on State Policy for Higher Education — to expand their understanding of and ability to act on the challenges outlined in this report. This two-year ECS initiative will involve governors and

higher education leadership in at least four states and legislative leadership in several others, focusing in particular on how to translate the public needs and expectations in each of these states into more effective state policies.

Second, working with the "experts" in the field, including the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, state coordinating and governing boards and others, ECS will continue to examine current state policies and practices for consistency with changing public needs. Toward this end, the work with states to examine current funding policies and develop performance-based alternatives, to develop specific objectives and policy frameworks for undergraduate education, and to support new forms of consumer information and approaches to accountability will be continued. The objective of these activities is to achieve closer alignment between state policies and public needs, recognizing that effective colleges and universities are key to meeting these needs.

Third, ECS will work with state and institutional leaders to explore new approaches and adaption to the changing knowledge base and nature of learning. These involve the use of new instructional technologies and education delivery systems, adapting traditional institutional and curricular patterns to meet changing student needs, and other ways to move higher education from the "repository of knowledge" to new roles in a knowledge-based, open learning society. Inherent in this transformation is the need to develop better ways to assess learning and knowledge levels, and to monitor institutional effectiveness in meeting these objectives.

These initiatives are part of a shared agenda around quality — an agenda that no group, set of state leaders, institutions or existing organizations can expect to dominate or control. *Making Quality Count* in higher education must involve an open process that examines existing practices and searches for new answers.



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